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THE BISHOP OF LANDAFF'S

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

ASHLEY COWPER

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

JANUARY 30, 1772.



Die Veneris, 31^o Januarii, 1772.

ORDERED, by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, that the Thanks of this House be, and are hereby, given to the Lord Bishop of LANDAFF, for the Sermon by him preached before this House Yesterday, in the Abbey Church *Westminster*.—And he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

ASHLEY COWPER,

Cler. Parliamentor.

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S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

IN THE

ABBAY CHURCH OF WESTMINSTER,

ON THURSDAY JANUARY 30, 1772,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED TO BE OBSERVED AS THE
DAY OF THE MARTYRDOM OF KING CHARLES I.

BY

SHUTE LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF.

H. Barrington

L O N D O N,

PRINTED BY W. BOWYER AND J. NICHOLS:

AND SOLD BY T. PAYNE, AT THE MEWS GATE, CASTLE STREET;

AND B. WHITE, AT HORACE'S HEAD, IN FLEET STREET,

MDCCLXXII.

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL

THE writings of St. Bernard have ever been esteemed as
valuable monuments of wisdom and piety.

ABBAY CHURCH OF WESTMINSTER
in the regulation of life and highly conducive both to
private and to public happiness: maxims which deserve to
be more to be regarded, as they were not only of the preachers
of the last century, but were originally established on
being the day appointed to be observed as the
day of the martyrdom of King Charles I.

SHUTELOUGH AND BISHOP OF ELY AND ADE

The present sermon, according to the custom of the house
in which it was delivered, in the language of scripture, is
and particularly of the book of Proverbs, Holy scriptures
only the want of understanding, but also the want of
virtue, or rather the practice of vice, which is the
chief obstacle to the attainment of wisdom.

AND SOLD BY T. PAYNE, AT THE NEWS COFFEE, CANNON STREET,
AND A. WHITE, AT HORACE'S HEAD, IN FLEET STREET.

MDCCLXXII.

PROV. i. 32.

THE PROSPERITY OF FOOLS SHALL DESTROY THEM.

THE writings of Solomon have ever been esteemed an invaluable treasure of wisdom and knowledge; abounding with short sententious maxims, extremely useful in the regulation of life, and highly conducive both to private and to publick happiness: maxims, which deserve the more to be regarded, as they were not built on the precarious basis of fanciful speculation, but were originally established on the most accurate observations of human nature, and have since been confirmed by the uniform experience of succeeding ages.

The maxim under contemplation is capable of two different interpretations, according to the different senses in which the terms are used. In the language of scripture in general, and particularly of this book of PROVERBS, Folly denotes not only the want of understanding, but often also the want of virtue, or rather, the practice of vice. Hence Fools may signify either wicked men, or men void of discretion. And the word

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which

which we render prosperity, and apply to Fools as acting wickedly, is in some ancient versions translated error, and attributed to them as acting indiscreetly*. But the consequences are in both cases nearly similar. For vice and indiscretion are equally destructive of personal tranquillity and happiness; equally the occasions of dissatisfaction and of misery.

According therefore to the former acceptation, the plain meaning of the passage is, that the sensual and the vicious, though they attain their wishes, are sure to be sufferers on their own plan; that to follow the impulse of sinful passions, or the instigation of criminal appetites, is the certain road to ruin; since all sin and debauchery have a natural and powerful tendency to "destroy" such as "foolishly" commit them. If we adopt the latter mode of explanation, the sense amounts to this; that we should not be content with merely doing what is in itself commendable and right; but also carefully attend to the circumstances of our actions, and look forward to the consequences which are likely to flow from them. For many measures of conduct, truly justifiable at the commencement, degenerate in their progress by wrong application or indiscreet management; and, instead of producing any beneficial effects, terminate in mischief and distress.

Both these interpretations are seemingly implied in the conclusion drawn at the next verse; where it is asserted, that He, and He only, "who hears, and listens to, the voice of

* *Verf. Syr.* Error carentium ratione perdet illos. Vide quoque *Targum* in loc.

“Wisdom;” who obeys the dictates of Piety and Discretion; can expect to live, and “dwell safely, and to be quiet
“from fear of evil.”

Keeping therefore both the preceding explications in view, I proceed to illustrate and confirm the observation in the Text.

The wisdom and goodness of the Sovereign author of the universe, and his gracious concern for the happiness of his creatures, are in no instance more visible, than in the admirable provision which he hath established in the original constitution of things, for the encouragement of virtue and the suppression of vice. The natural and the moral worlds are, by divine designation, so intimately connected, that the enjoyments or the sufferings which we derive from the one, are made to depend in a great measure on the good or ill conduct which we maintain in the other. A virtuous behaviour “is
“profitable unto all things; having the promise of the life
“that now is, as well as of that which is to come.” It is naturally productive of many eminent advantages, of many pleasurable sensations; which a vicious irregularity will not only destroy, but convert into disappointment, inconvenience and vexation. If therefore our prospect of existence was bounded by the present scene, and we were solicitous for nothing but an easy passage through this transitory state, it would evidently be our interest to “take heed to the thing
“that is lawful and right;” and notwithstanding the temptations and allurements which surround us, to “continue sted-

“fast in well-doing.” This is not merely “the will and
 “pleasure of God concerning us,” but also what the course
 and constitution of nature clearly indicates and recommends
 as the only genuine source of present or of future satisfaction.
 By such an uniform adherence to the true “path of life,”
 we are sure of being happy; because we are sure, at least, of
 the inward approbation of our own minds, which is the prin-
 cipal ingredient of happiness; and are by no means debarred
 of a reasonable and competent share of those outward com-
 forts, and secular advantages, which are the natural fruits of
 benevolence, sobriety and justice; and therefore generally ac-
 company the practice of those amiable Virtues. They who
 from a visionary expectation of higher enjoyments pursue a
 contrary plan, will find and will feel themselves at last most
 shamefully and wretchedly mistaken. For every vice, what-
 ever delusive shape it may assume, or whatever desirable gra-
 tification it may promise, is not only base and infamous in it-
 self, but tends also in its effects and consequences to obstruct
 and defeat the very purpose, which the commission of it was
 meant to promote. Even in the ways which are peculiarly
 stiled the ways of Pleasure, to what excruciating pains and
 afflictive diseases are her votaries exposed! How wretchedly do
 the Intemperate counteract their own designs; who, “foolishly”
 converting what nature destined for the relief and refresh-
 ment of the body into an oppressive load, destroy that very
 gratification which they thought to improve! Does not Pride
 invariably produce contempt instead of respect; and Avarice,
 while it enlarges the means, contract the capacity of enjoy-
 ment? Examine the fiercer passions by the same test. Does not

the mind, the instant it gives way to their impetuosity, feel the inconvenience, and become an immediate sufferer; since we can never indulge the impulse of Anger, Hatred, or Revenge, but a large part of the uneasiness recoils directly upon ourselves, and from hence we are often made more completely wretched than it may ever be in our power to render those who are the objects of our most determined abhorrence?

But these reflections are obvious, and can escape none but the thoughtless many. What even the wiser few do not always sufficiently consider is, that not from our vices alone result hurt and annoyance: our virtues indiscreetly managed may be attended with consequences equally injurious. Many excellent principles, and many laudable actions performed upon those principles, by being either unseasonably exerted, improperly applied, or urged beyond their due limits, produce effects as manifestly prejudicial to the persons, interest, and character of the agents, as almost any vices they could have been guilty of. It is not enough that we mean well, and are zealous of doing what is in itself praiseworthy; but we should also take care, in order to prevent mischief, that our zeal be always guided by prudence, even in the practice of that which is good. While it continues subject to such controul, its effects will ever be commendable; but when it breaks from this restraint, it becomes wild and extravagant; and, instead of promoting the end proposed, brings on a train of the most destructive consequences. Hence it appears with what singular propriety Solomon to "wisdom"*, or the practice of virtue, adjoins "discretion" as its Guardian. This is the grace which

* Prov. iii. 21.

renders

renders our conduct truly wise, and preserves it uniformly virtuous. Without it, "our good" might often with justice be "not" only "evil spoken of," but eventually felt to be evil both by ourselves and others.

For we are to observe further, that the good or ill effects of our conduct are by no means circumscribed within the narrow limits of private life, or the contracted concerns of individuals; but extend to collective bodies, and influence the affairs of Kingdoms, and of Empires. The very same virtues, which are so beneficial to the private man, when superadded to those of his fellow citizens, operate as kindly in favour of the public; promote the salutary ends of society; and secure its peace, success and prosperity. As such they have ever been honoured and revered; especially in the formation and infancy of states; when the circumstances of the Community required its members to exert all their useful abilities, and to unite all their benevolent offices, for its general welfare. By such vigorous and harmonious exertion of their powers, constantly displayed in the pursuit of public and of private virtues, we remark with astonishment in the history of mankind, how rapidly some petty states have advanced in strength, extent, and affluence. But when, debauched by prosperity, and enfeebled by ease, degenerating in their morals, and following the bent of corrupted inclinations, they devoted themselves to vice and sensuality, we trace the origin of their decline, and reflect with similar amazement how soon they tarnished their former lustre, involved themselves in misery, and sunk into meanness and contempt.

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But how fatal soever national vices may be, yet there are some national principles laudable in themselves, which, perverted, abused, or overstrained, operate on the public with equal malignity; and that by producing effects the most opposite to their avowed intent. The declension and fall of two of the most famous nations, which the world ever saw, supply us with striking instances of this truth; nations, whose misfortunes we may clearly date, in the one from the misapplication, in the other from the indiscreet prosecution, of that very principle, on the foundation of which they at first emerged, advanced, and flourished.

To what an eminence of security and power did the love of liberty, their ruling passion, carry the combined Republics of Greece, while moderated within its just bounds, and acting under the influence of discretion! But when over-refined by suspicion, and worked up to a captious jealousy, what civil contention, what intestine tumult, did it excite! How soon did it arm the confederate states against each other; till having, by unnecessary struggles among themselves, wasted their strength, they were unable to resist their common enemy; and ultimately became subject to slavery, by the "foolish" perversion of that glorious principle, which, properly directed, might have established them in happiness and independence!

The national characteristic of the Romans was an eager ambition of military glory, and an ardent thirst of extensive dominion. This they conceived to be the sure foundation of
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strength.

strength to the state, the certain preservative of a rough simplicity of manners among its members. A system, which, within a limited period, and to a limited degree, was crowned with amazing success: but when pushed to an extreme, became the destruction of both. Foreign conquests, remotely extended, debilitated the vigour of the empire; and made it an easy prey to the Northern Invaders; while the majesty of the Civil power, fell a victim to luxury in the city, and mutiny in the camp. Both the product of military glory.

But we need not travel to Greece or Rome for examples of this melancholy truth, that national calamities are the sure and unavoidable consequences of adopting bad principles, or pursuing even good to excess. The evils which we this day commemorate and deplore, when viewed in the calm light of history, free from all prepossessions of party, will appear to be the natural and genuine result of those vicious habits, perverted principles, and mistaken opinions, which in that age unhappily prevailed: and "the prosperity" of which, for a time, operated finally to their own "destruction," by producing effects seemingly the most opposite to their causes. These were principally,

1. An extravagant idea of the prerogatives, and almost divine authority, of regal power; derived from the pedantry of mere bookish, and the ambition of mere worldly men; and sometimes from an union of both.

2. An

2. An intolerant spirit of persecution in the ecclesiastical governors, exerted in the enforcement of points even of mere indifference.

3. As a counterpart to these, there raged among the people an impatience of that legal restraint, which is the sure preservative of civil liberty: and,

4. An over-weening affectation of novelty in religion, carried to as eager and absurd an excess as that of the most rigid Hierarchy.

5. An universal dissolution of manners among all ranks and degrees of men; occasioned by the plenty of the times, the increase of trade, and the example of a luxurious and ostentatious, though (in other respects) not a remarkably vicious Court.

Let us now trace each of these causes in its effects; and observe how they operated separately to their own detriment, and combined to the general unhappiness and misery of the nation.

1. The prerogative, being overstrained, lost all its energy; and by yielding now too much, as it had encroached before too far, produced the total ruin of all subordination and government.

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2. The indiscreet zeal of the Ecclesiastical Governors, in enforcing the punctilious observance of decent, but indifferent ceremonies, ended in the temporary annihilation of the being, and very name of the Church.

3. The spirit of licentiousness, which rejected the authority of legal coercion, was compelled to submit to a military tyranny, and a tenfold increase of taxes.

4. Those Spiritual Libertines, who could not brook the Apostolical institution of Episcopacy, and the pathetic simplicity of a devout, but rational Liturgy, only changed their old masters for worse; and soon found themselves under the thralldom of an equally intolerant Presbytery, and tied to as servile an adherence to an insipid and capricious Directory.

5. The luxurious and dissipated Retainers to the Court, experienced a sad vicissitude; being harraffed, plundered, persecuted; and necessitated either to wander obscurely amidst penury and danger at home; or, banished from their native soil, to seek a scanty and precarious subsistence in foreign countries.

But the licentiousness of the preceding times, improved by the dissoluteness of camps, and the insolence of free quarters, still reigned in the hearts of the people at large: and, though outwardly mortified by a specious appearance of extraordinary sanctity; yet, if history is to be credited, the

most zealous Reformers of that period only added to the most flagrant vices of their predecessors, the most impudent and profligate hypocrisy.

In the course of God's providence, these fanatical extremes paved the way for the happy restitution of our church and monarchy; somewhat benefited indeed by the sharp discipline of adversity; far however from being totally purged from intolerance and persecution in the one, or arbitrary notions in the other: the residue of which still operating, but with less violence, produced at length (like some other poisons) its own antidote, in a temperate and glorious REVOLUTION: the true æra of religious and civil liberty; when establishment was happily blended with toleration, and limited monarchy became the best guard to the rights of the subject. I wish I could add, that the private manners of our People have been reformed by the signal deliverances and improvements which our public constitution hath experienced. But it is greatly to be feared that, since that auspicious period, the blessings of Heaven have been equally, if not more wantonly, abused. Plenty has been perverted to luxury, and liberty made a cloak of licentiousness.

But it demands our most serious attention, to reflect in time where these abuses are likely to end; and to avoid pursuing them to their ultimate consequences. It hath already been shewn, that vice and dissoluteness naturally tend to injure society by various ways, and in various respects. They consume its wealth, impair its strength, and endanger its

freedom. The transition is easy and rapid, from ceasing to be morally free, to cease to be civilly so. Enslaved to our appetites and passions, we of course become slaves to those measures and pursuits, whatever they are, which contribute to support us in the gratification of them. Every member therefore of the community, who feels for the honour of his country, or who wishes its prosperity, must wish earnestly for a change in our morals; and endeavour, in proportion to the influence of his station, to encourage and promote the practice of public and of private virtue. For virtue is not only the bulwark of the state, but the guardian also of its liberty. It is virtue only that qualifies man for liberty; that enables him to estimate its just value; that arms him against every mean compliance which may endanger it; and leads him to that train of conduct, which is best adapted to preserve and to support it.

If these positions be just, how highly should we prize that constitution, which stands unparalleled in its polity; which the united wisdom of successive ages hath gradually moulded into its present perfect form; the invariable aim of which is, on the one hand, to check or to correct every vice which is prejudicial to the general welfare; and on the other, to patronize every virtue which tends to the advancement of the public good! There is scarce a crime that can affect the common safety, or a folly that can corrupt our morals, of which the Legislature hath not taken cognizance, and against which it hath not provided an adequate remedy. There is no good principle, no private or social virtue, which the established religion doth not inculcate,

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cate, and to the performance of which it doth not insure ample rewards. What then can be wanting, either to our public or private happiness, but a regular obedience to these Laws, a conscientious observance of the duties of this Religion?

But while this favoured Island is confessedly the envy and admiration even of those who have but barely heard its name, there are unhappily to be found among its own citizens some, who with assiduous and indiscreet zeal labour to discover flaws in its civil and ecclesiastical establishment; and form schemes of what they are pleased to denominate "improving the constitution," which would necessarily terminate in its subversion. In the times, which we this day lament, Reformation was the general cry; but the means employed to effect it destroyed the very end; multiplied the evils they were designed to remove; and at length brought on that fatal scene, which commenced in intestine discord, and finished in anarchy and blood.

Now these things happened to "our ancestors for examples; and they are written for our admonition," to the intent, "that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted; and were destroyed of the destroyer:" to the intent, that we should not indulge a wanton humour of disturbing settlements; but rest contented when we are well; lest God, for our ingratitude, should "take away our place and nation." We of this church and kingdom enjoy peculiar blessings, which it is no less our happiness, than it is our duty, so to estimate and use, as not to undervalue or
abuse

abuse them. Some imperfections will unavoidably cleave to every institution of human origin: but where the imperfections are slight and few, and the blessings secured are great and numerous, our wisdom would be to "let both go on together;" lest, while we intemperately "strive to pluck out some fancied tares, we together with them root up also the wheat itself."



